Pueblo Inquiry Tatters POW Conduct Code

By ROBERT WALTERS
Star Staff Writer

CORONADO, Calif. — The armed forces Code of Conduct, promulgated only 13½ years ago as a standard for American troops held in captivity, has emerged from hearings into the seizure of the USS Pueblo as a badly tattered document.

The failure of the Pueblo crew members — and the Defense Department — to follow the code's instructions is somewhat ironic because, unlike many of the centuries-old Navy traditions which also are being challenged here, it is a relatively contemporary guideline.

Moreover, it was issued in August, 1955 by President Dwight D. Eisenhower to combat exactly what the Pueblo crew faced during its 11 months of captivity — physical and psychological pressure to "confess" applied by the North Koreans against U. S. military men.

Two of the intelligence ship's six officers testified yesterday that they violated the code by describing to the North Koreans their jobs aboard the vessel only one day after the Pueblo was captured — and before any physical or mental torture was inflicted by their captors.

All 'Confessed'

In addition, they said, the four other officers acted similarly. And within weeks after the Pueblo's seizure — after varying degrees of physical pressure — all the officers also signed "confessions" that they had been engaged in espionage and had intruded on North Korea's territorial waters.

One of the six principal provisions of the Code of Conduct, governing the behavior of captured American servicemen, states:

"When questioned, should I become a prisoner of war, I am bound to give only name, rank, service number and date of birth. I will make no oral or written statements disloyal to my country and its allies or harmful to their cause."

The Navy already has issued an official ruling that the code was "inapplicable" because the Pueblo's 82 men were "illegal detainees," rather than "prisoners of war," but the five admirals presiding over the court of inquiry here are closely questioning witnesses about the extra-legal implications of failure to follow the code.

No Training, They Say

While readily acknowledging that they violated the code, the four officers to testify thus far — two yesterday and two earlier — also have told the court that the Navy never gave them any real training in how to conduct themselves if taken prisoner.

Lt. (j.g.), Frederick Schumacher Jr., 25, said he "received one or two lectures at officers' candidate school" on how to conduct himself should he be taken prisoner.

The other witnesses yesterday, Lt. (j.g.) Timothy L. Harris, the Pueblo's supply officer, said that beyond those lectures he also received no other training in that area.

Other witnesses have testified that a copy of the Code of Conduct was posted outside the Pueblo's ward room and that in the moments immediately before the North Korean boarding of the ship, the men were told over the public address system that they had to give only name, rank, serial number and age.

THE EVENING STAR
Washington, D. C., Wednesday, February 19, 1969

Otherwise, there apparently was no preparation for the lengthy period of capture.

Schumacher testified he believed the code was inapplicable to the Pueblo's 82 officers and crew member because the North Koreans had captured hundreds of pounds of classified documents when they boarded the ship on the afternoon of Jan. 23, 1968.

"In our case, it was a unique situation—they had all our documents, our service records. It was not a question of giving them classified information; it was a question of admitting to information that they already had," the operations officer said.

The difficulty in applying the code in the future was clearly illustrated when Vice Adm. Harold G. Bowen, president of the court of inquiry, asked Schumacher how the code should be implemented, in view of the Pueblo's experience.

Schumacher who had been very articulate, could only stumble and stammer: "In our situation — I'm not sure that if I went through it all over again, I'd probably do exactly the same thing — I think the Code of Conduct probably — well, I'm just not sure."

Schumacher said the Pueblo's six officers were summoned before the ranking North Korean officer at the barracks where they were being held prisoner on the afternoon of Jan. 24, 1968, only 24 hours after their ship was captured off the east coast of North Korea.

With six to eight other officers seated along one wall of the room, the commanding officer "began his interrogation by simply stating that we had been conducting espionage and that we had violated their territorial waters," Schumacher said.

Stated Job on Ship

In response to questions, and without any other provocation, each Pueblo officer then gave not only his name, rank and serial number and birth date, but also his job aboard the ship, Schumacher said. He admitted that was a violation of the code.

The operations officer also said he and the other five men told the North Koreans that "we were captured on the high seas 15.8 miles from the nearest land, and we were conducting oceanographic research."

Again, that was a violation of the code, but Schumacher explained: "We felt that we had to give them some explanation since they had captured the ship."

LOGIC?

The officers were never questioned again as a group, but Schumacher said he faced almost daily interrogation sessions, and each time he got the impression that the North Koreans had learned more about the Pueblo's intelligence mission by gradually translating the large number of classified documents found aboard the ship.

"We will torture you, we will kill you. We have ways of making you talk," Schumacher said he was told at one such encounter. Another time he was forced to squat on the floor with his hands over his head, surrounded by four armed guards, "two of whom had cocked machine guns aimed at my head."

Threats

Schumacher said the first

time he received any physical mistreatment — kicks in the ribs and arms — he agreed to describe what went on aboard the Pueblo, but proceeded to "just write down ten of the biggest lies I could think of."

At a later session, however, a North Korean colonel "proceeded to tell me about the ship, tell me what we were doing. It was obvious that they knew we were an intelligence gathering ship . . . what they were asking for was knowledge that I knew they had, and I knew that what they wanted they certainly could get out of me."

Schumacher said that among the psychological forces working on him were "fear of the unknown, not knowing what to expect, not knowing why we were still alive — all of the bad stories you've heard about past torture."

He said he recalled that in the past, the North Koreans had "tortured guys until they lost their minds — lost their best weapon of defense. . . . In my own mind, I was absolutely convinced that they would kill me, that they would further torture me. . . . In each one of the interrogations, I was told that I was going to die, that I would be killed."

Finally, on the night of Jan. 30, 1968, Schumacher said he was interrogated for the sixth time and told by the North Korean commanding officer: "We've read what you've written. Do you take us for fools?"

The North Korean colonel—later promoted to general—displayed eight or 10 "very highly classified" documents captured from the Pueblo, including the patrol report, "which described in great detail the role of the ship," Schumacher said. "They knew the mission of the ship until the day before capture."

The witness said he "confirmed the information that they already had" but the next day he was interrogated by another North Korean who wanted to know still more.

On Feb. 1, 1968—one week after the Pueblo's seizure — Schumacher said he was called back for his ninth interrogation session, and the North Korean commanding officer "handed me a typed confession that they had prepared. He asked me if I would sign it. I said yes, I would sign it."

Schumacher acknowledged that he had not been tortured and sustained only limited physical abuse until that time, but went on to describe living conditions which he said had the psychological effect of building up anxiety:

"For 40 days, the lights were on continuously" in the rooms where the crew members were housed, the floors and beds were made of crude wooden slats, the only furniture was a table and chair, along with a bucket in one corner of the room for washing.

"The guards would fling the doors open and come stomping into your room every 45 minutes," he told the court. "You didn't see anything happen, but you could hear what was going on. My imagination tended to hear the worst at all times. . . . It sounded like someone else was being beat up."

Schumacher said the North Koreans told him that Cmdr. Lloyd M. Bucher, the Pueblo's captain "had already made a confession, (but) I could not believe that. I though all of the other officers were dead."

But after all of the officers had signed such confessions, they were allowed to see one another at meals and for about an hour in the evening to play cards or chess. In addition, they each received a pack of cigarettes daily and other amenities, and—like the crew members—were not badly mistreated for most of the remainder of their stay in Pyongyang, North Korea's capital.

"I think everyone thought of escape plans at one time or another," Schumacher said in response to a question. "We felt that we could get out of the (detention) center, but there was no one to turn to for help on the outside. On the basis of what we were told by the army officers, we thought the average North Korean would probably shoot an American on sight."

Two weeks prior to their release—in early December of 1968—the members of the Pueblo's crew were subjected to the worst physical punishment they received, with the exception of that inflicted on some men at the beginning of the captivity period.

Harris, in recounting the events which led to his confession, said that "after two weeks, they called me in and said I had to write a confession of espionage and intrusion. . . ."

Harris said he (wrote) out a confession on rough paper, but did not (sign) it. He said he never saw it again, however. Prior to that time, he had been subjected to interrogation and threats of death similar to that experienced by Schumacher, but also had not been severely beaten.